

News

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RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN PARENTS AND CHILD CREATE PERSONALITIES SUSCEPTIBLE
TO UNDEMOCRATIC IDEOLOGIES, DECLARES CO-EDITOR OF STUDIES IN PREJUDICE SERIES

Dr. Samuel H. Flowerman, director of American Jewish Committee's Department of Scientific Research, Tells Committee's New York Chapter That Lack of Affection and Understanding Mould "Authoritarian" Personalities.

The "authoritarian" personality, the type of human being who is peculiarly susceptible to undemocratic ideologies because he has a deep inner need to submit to power or to align himself with it, has been scientifically explored and described for the first time by social scientists, Dr. Samuel H. Flowerman, director of the Department of Scientific Research of the American Jewish Committee, declared on Thursday (March 9) in an address before a luncheon meeting of the Committee's New York Chapter at the Hotel Martinique.

This predisposition in some men and women, said Dr. Flowerman, stems from their experiences in early childhood. He pointed out that psychologists, psychoanalysts, sociologists, historians and other social scientists have spent almost five years tracking down the psychological characteristics of people who, in a democratic society like ours, still harbor undemocratic ideas, imbued with ill-will and even hatred for human beings who happen to differ from themselves in race, religion or national origin.

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This vast program of scientific research was sponsored by the American Jewish Committee in cooperation with leading universities and colleges throughout the country, and the findings are contained in the five-volume series of Studies in Prejudice published by Harper and Brothers. Dr. Flowerman is one of the co-editors of the series.

In reporting on the findings, Dr. Flowerman described the psychological make-up of "authoritarian personalities" as that of people who readily surrender their social and political freedoms because they lack that inner security which enables human beings to function as independent individuals.

Such people tend to fear and dislike persons outside their own groups; they accept without question the prevailing judgements of society; they put everything and everyone into hard-and-fast categories, and they cannot adapt themselves to new and changing conditions. This rigidity of outlook dominates their attitudes toward parents, wife, children, work, politics and sex. They see the world as a tug-of-war between the powerful and the weak, and they must either align themselves with the powerful, even if only in fantasy, or else with the camp-followers of a powerful leader.

Dr. Flowerman reported that the evidence gathered by the scientists shows overwhelmingly that such "authoritarian" personalities are moulded by the experiences of their early childhood.

"Where a youngster is subjected to harsh discipline, and lacks deep affection and understanding," said Dr. Flowerman, "he grows up with a feeling of a world dominated by inexorable power -- as represented by his parents. In such an atmosphere, he becomes entirely dependent upon higher authorities for his judgments as well as his responses, and as he grows up he continues to seek symbols of authority in the society about him, as a substitute for the parent-authority which was his mainstay in his formative years. In this process, his capacity to experience real emotion is throttled, as is his ability to function as an independent human

being.

"The result, as the scientists demonstrate, is an 'authoritarian' personality—a human being with little insight either into other persons or himself, who therefore tends to lump people into categories and to label them accordingly. Even where his own experience contradicts the label, he is unable to accept the experience, but must instead invent reasons for the other person's behavior to strengthen his own prejudices."

Dr. Flowerman pointed out that these findings enable us to understand what happened in Germany where the father was usually a powerful symbol of authority in the family. Thus the Nazi state was able to usurp his place and so to do its will with a nation of 80,000,000 persons through the clever manipulation of power symbols.

"Thus, should the United States experience a real crisis," Dr. Flowerman declared, "the threat to our democratic institutions would lie not so much in any un-American ideology or in un-American forces, but rather in the degree to which individual Americans are likely to accept totalitarian ideas.

"Because the 'authoritarian' personality is a man divorced from love, he tends to be cynical and mostly contemptuous of other people. To such a man the rule of violence can be made to look reasonable and just, precisely because he has an enduring need to rationalize his own hostilities."

Mr. Edwin J. Lukas, chairman of the public school affairs committee of the New York Chapter, and member of the American Jewish Committee's scientific research committee, presided at the meeting.

Col. Harold Riegelman is chairman of the New York Chapter of the American Jewish Committee, which is a beneficiary agency of the Joint Defense Appeal, and which was founded forty-four years ago to combat bigotry and promote democratic principles in the United States, to protect the civil and religious rights of Jews overseas, and to further Jewish cultural, religious and communal interests in this country.
